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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000575

SIPDIS

FOR NEA, NEA/ELA AND AID

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KISL KWMN SOCI EG

SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER ON FAMILY PLANNING, GIRLS' EDUCATION  
AND CHILD LABOR

REF: CAIRO 44

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey for reason 1.4 (b).

**11. KEY POINTS**

-- (C) On March 29, New Minister for Families and Population Moushira Khattab told the Ambassador and the USAID Mission Director that significant economic development in Egypt will not be possible without limiting population growth.

-- (C) Minister Khattab said that girls' education is essential for limiting population growth, noting that women with more education have fewer children. Khattab described how child labor prevents girls from attending school and consequently also fuels population growth.

-- (C) She committed to using a system of incentives and penalties to encourage families to send their daughters to school, instead of work, and to use contraception to limit family size.

-- (C) Khattab pledged to work with grass roots civil society organizations and use media campaigns in a decentralized effort to change public attitudes in order to limit family size.

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**The Importance of Family Planning**  
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**12. (C) New Minister for Families and Population Moushira Khattab**, who was sworn in March 11, said she views her appointment and the creation of her new ministry as a vote of confidence from President Mubarak. Minister Khattab said that her new ministry is working to hire staff and receive funding for ministry operations. She noted that she would need to raise money from private benefactors for activities such as a media campaign on birth control. Khattab plans to draw on her experience as Secretary-General of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) from 1999 to 2009 to work with grass roots organizations to change public opinion about birth control, child labor and girls' education.

**13. (C) She said that significant economic development will be impossible without limiting population growth, and that lowering birth rates is essential to improving quality of life and countering religious fundamentalism.** She complained that "seven year-old girls" are now wearing "the veil." The Minister noted that large families correspond with low socio-economic levels and poorly educated mothers. She underscored three major population problems facing Egypt: a population increase, uneven population distribution throughout the country, and economic inequality.

## Family Planning

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¶ 14. (C) Khattab said her new ministry would work on developing innovative, family planning education at local centers, while the Health Ministry would continue to supply contraception. She emphasized the need to convince Egyptians to use contraception consistently, noting that many people begin using it, but then stop. Mona Amin, senior advisor to the minister, said reliable statistics show that 80 percent of Egyptians used contraception at one time, but then stopped. Khattab said the new ministry's goal is to reward contraception use and penalize large families. Egypt is falling behind on its birth control targets, she said. While the goal is 2.1 children per family by 2011, the current rate is 3.

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## Girls' Education

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¶ 15. (C) Minister Khattab underlined the importance of girls education in population control, noting that expanded education empowers women and educates them about their rights. Khattab said that as NCCM Secretary-General she worked with over 1,000 schools in impoverished areas to provide improved education for girls, and coordinated with GOE ministries and the private sector to build new schools. She noted that her new ministry would not work on school construction, which is the "duty" of the Ministry of Education. Khattab said that in "girl-friendly" schools supported by the GOE, teachers are more responsive and will

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lobby for girls to stay in school when students plan to leave school and marry at the age of 15.

¶ 16. (C) Khattab said one goal of education for girls in impoverished rural areas is to encourage them to speak about their personal problems. "Some of these girls have been working all night before the school day," she said. Khattab asserted that families need incentives to continue sending girls to school, and noted she wants to increase the World Food Program's current provision of food to families in three governorates who send their daughters to school. NGOs also give clothing as an incentive to families who send their daughters to school, Khattab said. She described the quality of Egyptian education as poor, and said new education models are needed in marginalized areas such as Sohag, in Upper Egypt. She praised the fortitude of Egyptian teachers, who sometimes receive their inadequate monthly salaries nine months late.

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## Child Labor

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¶ 17. (C) Khattab lamented that many Egyptians, including some of the elite, believe "the myth" that child labor is a short-term avenue out of poverty. The rates of children working as domestic servants have decreased, she said, due to social stigma. Khattab planned to enlist the support of key ministers, such as the Ministers of Trade, Manpower and Islamic Endowments, to stop child labor for the long-term good of the country. She recounted telling Prime Minister Nazif that the best way to prevent child labor is to "kill the incentives" that motivate families.

¶ 18. (C) Khattab asserted that families who send their children to work should not receive government-provided housing, and that the government needs to do more to enroll girls in pre-school before families become accustomed to the income these children generate. She said that while President Mubarak pledged in 2004 that 60 percent of Egyptian children would attend pre-schools by 2011, the current percentage is only 12-13. She said that encouraging children in

marginalized areas to go to school, even if only "for a few hours per day," would result in better life skills and values for these children.

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USAID Contributions  
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¶ 9. (SBU) USAID Mission Director encouraged coordination between the Ministries of Families and Population, Education, Labor, Social Solidarity and Health on USAID programs that are implemented through GOE "line ministries." AID Mission Director offered to tailor programs to the new ministry's priorities. The minister thanked the Ambassador and the Mission Director for USG support for the violence against children project and the family justice program.

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